Congressional Roundup

Gates Orders Disclosure Of C.I.A. File on Oswald

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WASHINGTON, May 12 — Robert M. Gates, the Director of Central Intelligence, said today that he had ordered the release within days of a secret C.I.A. file on Lee Harvey Oswald's activities before the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963.

Mr. Gates's announcement of the declassification of the 110-page file represented a first trickle in what could soon be a vast river of assassination documents to be made public soon. He testified on legislation to create a review board to speed the disclosure of the estimated one million documents on the case still in the Government's hands.

Mr. Gates announced the voluntary release of the Oswald material at a Senate hearing on the legislation, a Congressional effort to respond to public skepticism about the official accounts of the Kennedy assassination and revived interest in the matter spawned by the recent film "J.F.K."

The movie, which challenged a central finding of a Presidential review commission convened after the killing, has been criticized by historians as distorting the facts. The commission concluded that Oswald acted alone when he shot Kennedy in a Dallas motorcade on Nov. 22, 1963.

The material in the Oswald file relates to a shadowy period that has been the subject of decades of conjecture by historians and conspiracy theorists. During that period the former Marine Corps radar technician familiar with U-2 spy flights defected to the Soviet Union in 1959, redefected to the United States in 1962 and traveled to Mexico City in September 1963.

For Mr. Gates, the disclosure of the file seemed to represent an effort to align his agency on the side of full disclosure on a highly popular issue even though the C.I.A. has for years ferociously guarded even the most trivial secrets in its files.

The file, which was made available to The Associated Press today, consists of 33 documents, 11 of them originating in the C.I.A.

James Lesar, a lawyer who operates the Assassination Archive and Research Center in Washington, said that based on a cursory reading of the documents the material has been available to researchers. Many of the documents are F.B.I. memos sent to the C.I.A. and may be among those already released by the F.B.I. in response to Freedom of Information requests.

Mr. Gates and William S. Sessions, the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, who also testified today before the Governmental Affairs Committee, embraced the goal of opening the records. But they warned that the powers the legislation would grant the review board encroached on executive branch prerogatives, like the authority to protect classified information.

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